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### **III. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

#### **A. OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

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#### **1. OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

This section provides a brief, general overview of the environmental conditions and issues in the project area. A complete description of the environmental setting pertaining to each potential impact is included in the respective setting sections of Section IV., Environmental Impact Analysis, of the Draft EIR.

##### **a. City of Huntington Beach – General**

Huntington Beach is located in the northwest portion of Orange County and is adjacent to the cities of Seal Beach and Westminster to the north, Fountain Valley to the east, Costa Mesa to the south and east, and the Pacific Ocean to the southwest. Incorporated in 1909, it was the sixth city formed in Orange County. Currently, Huntington Beach is the third largest populated city in Orange County, with 98 percent of the City developed. According to SCAG 2001 RTP forecasts, the City's 2000 population was 198,015 and is projected to grow to 208,983 and 224,932 in 2005 and 2020, respectively.

##### **b. Retail Development**

A top priority of the City Council is to increase commercial development opportunities and to improve the City's revenue base. In July 1996, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 96-57 resolving "... to pursue commercial development opportunities on large parcels adjacent to major arterial highways, including vacant/surplus school sites, or any other vacant or underutilized sites or parcels in the City..." The resolution acknowledges and supports the required land use review and public hearing processes, as well as the necessity to mitigate potential impacts to the surrounding neighborhood to the greatest extent possible.

##### **c. Surplus School Sites**

The City General Plan recognizes the issue that "non-operational schools are being leased for other uses, while other schools are overcrowded." A foremost consideration in the closure of a school site, therefore, is the potential requirement for the school to meet future educational needs in the immediate area or district-wide.

Closed school sites offer both opportunities and potential loss of resources to a community. These include:

- The opportunity for conversion to other public and/or private institutional uses such as providing senior citizen care or recreation facilities, child daycare, or facilities for religious activities;
- Potential loss of community recreational opportunities with the re-use or redevelopment of school sites; and
- Potential transition to commercial uses, which can provide economic development opportunities to the City.

Goals, objectives, and policies are set forth in the City's General Plan, which address each of the above issues. The Public Facilities and Services Element includes policies to encourage continued public use of closed school sites and also to implement shared responsibility agreements between the City and the school districts to maintain and operate school properties where public recreation activities occur. The Recreation and Community Services Element includes specific policies to review the relationship of parks and recreation facilities with local schools and to identify alternative plans to provide recreational opportunities in the event of a school closure.

Resolution 96-57, as described in the previous section, recognizes the economic development potential of closed school sites. In particular, this resolution focuses on large parcels adjacent to major arterials, including vacant, surplus school sites, which lend themselves to commercial/retail development. Under the resolution, commercial site plans shall be reviewed to mitigate the potential impacts to the surrounding neighborhood while still allowing for a market-driven development.

#### **d. Project Site and Surrounding Uses**

The project site is located in the City of Huntington Beach (City) in western Orange County (County). The project site consists of approximately 25.6 acres located on the northeast corner of Beach Boulevard and Warner Avenue approximately one mile south of the San Diego Freeway (I-405). The project site is bounded by: Robidoux Drive and the Ocean View Flood Control Channel on the north; multi-family residential on the east; Warner Avenue on the south; and Beach Boulevard on the west. Adjacent jurisdictions in the vicinity of the project site include the City of Westminster approximately one-half mile to the north and the City of Fountain Valley approximately one-half mile to the east.

The proposed project is divided into three areas – Area A, B1, and B2. Area A of the project site consists of approximately 13.0 net acres of the former Rancho View Elementary School property located east of B Street. Area A includes school facilities, six baseball fields, an open grass field, an asphalt play area, a surface parking lot, walkways, and landscape areas. Area B1 consists of 6.3 acres of a developed area west of B Street. The area west of B Street currently includes retail/commercial, restaurant and office uses, and nine residential units for a total of approximately 41,300 square feet of development. The majority of the commercial uses front Beach Boulevard, with the remaining commercial uses located at the corner of Beach Boulevard and Warner Avenue. Area B2 of the project site consists of 4.9 net acres and includes the existing Ocean View School District Bus Maintenance Facility and undeveloped area. A Street and B Street, which run north-south, cross the western portion of the project site.

A Southern California Edison (SCE) electrical substation is located at the northwest corner of Warner Boulevard and B Street, immediately adjacent to and surrounded on three sides by the project site. This property, however, is not a part of the proposed project or the project site. Other surrounding land uses include: automobile dealerships located to the northwest and single-family residential uses directly to the north of the project site across the Ocean View Flood Control Channel; multi-family residential uses to the east; single- and multi-family residential uses to the south across Warner Avenue; and retail/commercial and office uses to the west across Beach Boulevard.

The automobile dealership located northwest of the project site is characterized by a large open lot for vehicle display, a showroom with offices, and an auto repair/maintenance facility. The buildings are generally one-story in height. The automobile dealership uses nighttime lighting for display of the vehicles and security purposes. The residential dwellings located east and south of the project site consist predominately of one-story single-family detached homes, one story multi-family attached apartments, and two-story multi-family attached apartments. The western boundary of the project site is typical of the Beach Boulevard Corridor and includes general commercial properties such as fast-food restaurants, gas stations, and various commercial offices.